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Published online: 11 Mar 2022.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

'I can't unsee what I've seen:' Doing Social Justice Pedagogy in the research methods classroom

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ABSTRACT

Discourse surrounding social justice pedagogy (SJP) as a means of addressing the historic inequities in education is increasing in education research. Qualitative research, however, examining experiences of educators doing SJP is still lacking, particularly in higher education. We trained three faculty instructors of undergraduate research courses in principles of SJP and several classroom activities grounded in these principles. Analysis of critically-reflexive reflections and interviews revealed four themes related to doing SJP: Intentionality; Vulnerability; Holding Tension; and Meaningful Teaching Experience. Findings provide an intrapersonal framework for doing SJP and implications for supportive learning circles and institutional support.

Social justice pedagogy (SJP) is an important means of addressing historic and systemic oppression of underrepresented students by making activism and social change central to one's personal vision of how one teaches and learns (Adams and Love 2009). Rooted in critical theories, SJP seeks to not only transform curriculum and instruction to promote inclusivity and student success, but 'equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to transform society into a place where social justice *can* exist' (Westheimer and Suurtamm 2008, 590). However, a dizzying array of approaches to SJP, little research focused on experiences in 'translating social justice ideals into viable pedagogy', and the current controversy surrounding Critical Race Theory (CRT) amplify the challenges faculty face in bridging the gap between what is taught and how it is taught (Agarwal et al. 2010, 237; McArthur 2010; Taylor et al. 2019; Jaleel 2021). Across the nation, new laws denouncing the teaching of CRT have sparked distress and confusion. Navigating how to teach with a lens that seeks to dismantle systemic oppression has left many educators fearing losing their jobs and struggling with knowing what to teach (Cineas 2021). For many, the expectations and goals of doing SJP can feel overwhelming and lofty given the lack of institutional support, time constraints, and demands of prescribed learning outcomes and academic bureaucracies (Kelly, Brandes, and Orlowski 2004; Taylor

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et al. 2019). A lack of practical tools that support both the facilitation and assessment of SJP also makes it challenging to ascertain if one has done *enough* to claim she is indeed teaching for social justice. More studies examining the experiences of faculty doing SJP would not only benefit faculty in thinking through what it means to imagine themselves as social justice educators but validate the inevitable struggles associated with embodying social justice in the classroom. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of three faculty members doing SJP in research methods courses. Through the examination of critically-reflexive reflections and interviews, we sought to highlight the challenges and possibilities of doing SJP and what it means to be a social justice educator.

Theoretical context

SJP is grounded in critical pedagogy approaches that view teaching and learning as participatory, collaborative processes (Breunig 2005; St. Clair and Groccia 2009). It is rooted in social movements, critical theory, and indigenous knowledges (Chapman and Hobbel 2010). At its core, SJP is 'teaching that directly addresses power and privilege issues, reduces stereotype threat, uses a variety of pedagogical strategies that increase sense of belongingness and communal values, models greater inclusivity, and highlights the relevance of the content to students' personal lives' (Taylor et al. 2019, 141).

While theoretical models of SJP do well to explain the *what* of SJP, the *how* is less clear. Essentially, the *what* of SJP considers what we do and believe as social justice educators, the desire for knowledge and identification with the values and aims of social justice, but the *how* considers who we are and who we are becoming as 'learner-educators in social justice education' (Quin 2009, 111). In other words, the *how* of SJP encompasses the experiential, *intra*personal process involved in developing social justice competency and identifying 'the ways in which our positionality, biases, preconceived notions about pedagogy, previous training, the university 'climate,' and student composition' impact how we approach doing SJP (Breunig 2016, 5). This intrapersonal process is often achieved through engaging in critical reflexivity.

Critical reflexivity, a practice of change and new learning, is grounded in models of reflective practice and critical pedagogy and aims to develop the subjective self as an instrument for SJP. Moving beyond the often apolitical practice of reflection which may over emphasize the role of the individual without consideration for the impact of power and social structures (Morley 2015), critical reflexivity involves a higher level of abstraction that (a) elucidates the ways in which reality is socially constructed, (b) questions the 'truth' of dominant narratives and hegemonies, (c) identifies and understands the ways in which power and positionalities shape our social identities, interactions, and lived experiences, (d) recognizes how our personal social locations impact how we understand and approach teaching and learning, and (e) acts to dismantle oppressive systems by creating counterspaces for alternative, liberatory discourses (Esposito, Freda, and Picione 2016; Jacobson and Mustafa 2019; Magill 2021).

In practice, critical reflexivity may look like journaling about and questioning one's own past beliefs and actions about teaching and learning or may involve group discussions with colleagues about subjectivity in the construction of knowledge in our fields. In a classroom, it draws attention to power, privilege, and context situated within a case study or research article. While developing courses, it demands a foregrounding

of non-dominant voices that challenge the dominant perspectives and approaches of our fields. Pedagogical research grounded in critical reflexivity promotes self-critique, acknowledgment of the role of power and social position in classroom experiences and outcomes, and questioning that goes beyond prevailing understandings and assumptions. Critical reflexivity practiced alone or in community offers a way to deepen our 'consciousness of self and society and self in society' as a means to 'keep ourselves on the keen learning-awareness edge that ensures our continuous growth and guards against falling into oppressive and/or disempowering practices, no matter how subtle' (Quin 2009, 111). Without critical reflexivity, the classroom simply becomes a site for transmitting values and practices rooted in specific and often dominant values, assumptions, and narratives. It serves as a crucial reminder that educators 'are always implicated in the very structures they are trying to change' (Ellsworth 2010, 310).

Numerous studies have highlighted the beneficial role of SJP and critical reflexivity in the academic success of underrepresented students, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) research courses (Hamstra, Ampaw, and Hornak 2021; Aronson and Laughter 2016; Warburton 2016). These courses have higher rates of withdrawal and failure among underrepresented students than other, same-level courses. This is notable as they are also gateway courses to advancing within STEM majors and fields (Hamstra, Ampaw, and Hornak 2021). Research courses, often rated as irrelevant by students, have typically been characterized by a lot of content without much pedagogical guidance, with instructors often feeling they have to sacrifice pedagogy in order to ensure material is covered (Hamstra, Ampaw, and Hornak 2021; Nind, Kilburn, and Luff 2015; Wagner, Garner, and Kawulich 2011). Therefore, we chose to focus on the experiences of faculty doing SJP in undergraduate research methods courses.

Materials and methods

Study background

The current study is the result of five faculty members' engagement in a faculty learning community (FLC) focused on fostering ongoing dialogue about SJP. Through feedback, advice, and troubleshooting, FLCs lessen feelings of isolation and provide means for continuous professional and personal development (Love et al. 2021). From questions and ideas that emerged during our FLC discussions, we determined to better understand the impact of SJP by examining faculty experiences with applying SJP intervention strategies in three undergraduate research methods courses. The intervention courses included intact sections of required undergraduate research methods courses in health education, kinesiology, and social work. Faculty participants submitted weekly critical reflections via email during the semester and then were interviewed by another FLC member after finishing the semester.

The FLC was composed of five faculty members from departments in the same College of one University. Two of the FLC members work in the same department, while the other three each have appointments in different departments. Although some FLC members were familiar with one another from engaging in various professional activities together across campus, none of us had previously collaborated on research before the

FLC was assembled by our senior faculty member in order to pursue grant funding. Prior to the semester in which the study took place, participants engaged in approximately ten hours of SJP training. The training included readings, written assignments, and group discussions. During the implementation phase, the three participants met monthly with the FLC to discuss their progress and any challenges with the intervention strategies that arose.

The FLC collected materials to help the participants become more familiar with pertinent theories and SJP practices and to provide them with intervention strategy examples to use in their classes. The model we used blended theories of stereotype threat and growth mindset with SJP. Participants were provided with two SJP checklists: (1) the Social Justice Syllabus Design Tool (SJSDT) (Taylor et al. 2019); and (2) an inclusive readings checklist. The overall objective of the training materials was to assist participants in developing a welcoming, inclusive, growth-oriented, social justice-centered syllabus and course design. This activity prompted discussion about the class as a whole, including syllabus language, as well as grading and other aspects of the course, the degree to which the class showed students the relevance of the content to their professional and personal lives, and whether there was a welcoming tone that might foster a sense of belonging.

The FLC also included four SJP strategies for participants to implement in their classes: (1) a belongingness activity for instructors to conduct during the first class to help students feel acknowledged, validate their experiences, and generate awareness of class expectations; (2) instructors introduced the concept of growth mindset by playing a YouTube video (Stanford Alumni 2014); (3) two non-graded 10–15 min-long values affirmation writing assignments, one focused on communal goals and one focused on social justice research values.; and (4) role-modeling as a means of increasing a sense of belongingness. Instructors invited three guest speakers to address their classes; an undergraduate student, a graduate student, and a professor from underrepresented populations in academia who were actively involved in research in the field of the class. Speakers were asked to share their personal background, academic experience, and research interests and spoke for approximately 30 min each.

For consistency across all sections of the intervention classes, participants were asked to administer the same SJP strategies in the same manner. However, due to the performative nature of teaching, class dynamics, time constraints, and differences in participants' levels of experience, slight variations in fidelity to the intervention elements were unavoidable.

Data collection

A member of the research team with experience teaching, conducting qualitative research, and integrating SJP in her courses, but who did not teach any of the intervention classes, conducted semi-structured critically-reflexive interviews with each participant about their experiences using SJP interventions. The authors responsible for conducting interviews and analyzing data shared insider status with the participants. However, there were differences in positionality among co-authors in terms of faculty rank, SJP experience, sexual orientation, racial identity, and ethnic identity (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). The approximately one-hour interviews focused on participants'

perceptions of themselves and their students in relation to the SJP strategies. Examples of interview questions included: 'What do you think went particularly well in your teaching this semester?'; 'What were the biggest challenges in teaching this course this semester?'; and 'What strategies do you think most helped students engage with material in research methods?'

Email journaling provided the participants with a means of reflecting on their own positions within the social institution of higher education as they implemented new pedagogical strategies (Smith 2011), while allowing the lead authors a contemporaneous glimpse into the lived experience of engaging with SJP. Participants responded to weekly critical reflection prompts via email facilitated by a student research assistant, such as 'What class exercises do you think went well this week?'; 'Describe any challenges you experienced related to the intervention materials this week'; and 'Did you feel uncomfortable at any time in class this week?' This research project received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of our University.

Data analysis

The participant interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and along with the written weekly reflections, analyzed for common themes. Additionally, participants provided their course syllabi. Thematic analysis was used to identify themes across interviews, rather than from a priori codes or theory-driven categories (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). To ensure trustworthiness, the three members of the FLC who did not teach an intervention section independently identified themes. The final set of themes was confirmed after three rounds of review, when consensus was reached among coders.

Participants

The participants were three instructors from different departments at a large, public, metropolitan university. All had previous, extensive experience teaching and developing research methods courses, but varying degrees of training and experience with SJP prior to participating in this study (see Table 1).

Laura is a white, European American assistant professor with areas of expertise in statistics, research methodology, and sport and exercise psychology. She has developed and

Table 1. Participant Characteristics.

Pseudonym	Laura	Paula	Christine
Gender	F	F	F
Ethnicity	White	Filipinx	White
Age	40	50	50
Discipline/Scholarly Focus	Kinesiology, sport and exercise psychology	Social work, international social development, gender and peace-building	Public Health, Women's health, community health
Years Teaching Experience	13	12	18
Years Research Methods Teaching Experience	11	12	7
Baseline Familiarity with Social Justice Pedagogy	Very little	Moderate	Moderate

taught research methods courses at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Her teaching philosophy 'centers on the idea that learning is interactive and collaborative' and she strives to build an autonomy-supportive environment in the classroom. Laura's research methods course objectives are to 'provide a fundamental understanding of research methodology in kinesiology, including the various ways in which research questions are pursued and tools for evaluating the validity and reliability of findings related to movement, sport, and physical activity.' Of the three participants, Laura had the least amount of experience with explicitly incorporating SJP in her teaching and scholarship.

Christine, an associate professor, is a white, European American woman. Her areas of expertise include women's health and community-based research methods. She designs her course to introduce students to research methods and statistics with a focus on helping students 'learn how to critically read and understand peer-reviewed research articles.' On her syllabus, Christine promises students, 'I will do my best to help you develop an understanding of concepts and skills so that you become comfortable with research and statistics and can use them in this major and in the field after graduation.' Christine has significant experience incorporating SJP into her teaching and scholarship.

Paula, an associate professor, is a Filipina woman who specializes in international social development, SJP, and community organizing. She teaches a wide array of social work courses, including research methods, and believes that her 'role as an educator is to inspire a passion for knowledge and learning among students and to encourage them to think critically about their circumstances.' Paula developed her course with the aim of providing students 'with an introductory understanding of social work research as scientific method and its application to generalist social work practice.' For Paula, social justice is a core principle of both her scholarly work and community activism.

Results

Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and weekly reflection emails revealed four major, interrelated themes: (1) *Intentionality*; (2) *Holding Tension*; (3) *Vulnerability*; and (4) *Meaningful Teaching Experience*. Each theme contained two or more subthemes.

Intentionality

Despite differences in their previous levels of engagement with SJP, all three participants shared that participating in this study raised their consciousness about the value of infusing SJP into their approach to teaching research methods. They indicated that their experiences throughout the intervention strengthened their commitment to more explicitly integrate SJP in all of their classes.

Increased consciousness

Laura, the team member with the least SJP experience, noted how participating in this study provided her with important first steps in her pedagogical growth: 'I feel like this is like awareness semester (laughs), like put a few little elements of the intervention, but like just be aware of how little you talk about social justice.' For Christine and Paula,

participating in this study was an opportunity to build on their previous experience with SJP by further integrating the practice into their approaches to teaching research methods. As Paula explained:

> At least for our program, social justice, it's infused in all the courses, so it's in some ways, you know, continuing the conversation around social justice. In some ways like being intentionally redundant about it, but then this time we were looking at how it informs research, you know since it's a different experience, a new sort of context and understanding social justice. So, I felt that activity was helpful in setting the frame for the class, and then also picking up from where they [students] left off in other classes around social justice.

Christine came to view 'teaching statistics while being mindful of SJP [as] really giving students many opportunities to find a … to make mistakes and you know, to grow through process.'

Commitment to social justice

One common characteristic that inspired all three educators was their shared commitment to the principles of SJP and to implementing strategies that promote these principles. Their experience as part of the FLC helped extend that commitment to challenging themselves and engaging students in all of their courses in meaningful and different ways. Christine shared, 'I think that our intervention has really … kind of impacted my teaching in other courses as well,' and that 'the degree of students feeling safe in the classroom depends on … course material … really honoring the experiences of everyone in a positive way.' For Paula, learning about different intervention strategies like the values affirmation was important: 'that's not something I did previously in this class, so I thought it was helpful to like start out with social justice research values.' Laura struggled with her sense of self-efficacy as a social justice pedagogue throughout the semester, yet vowed to continue the practice: 'I felt like I was gonna suck at it. I don't think I did a great job but I think I did a good job, um, and I think that, this has, I said this in the reflection and I believe it's true, like I can't go BACK. I can't unsee what I've seen.'

Holding Tension

The participants all experienced tension and felt constrained by time and perceived priorities as they adopted an SJP approach to teaching their research methods classes. They found themselves holding tension between: (a) *real life vs. intervention agenda*; (b) *course content vs. intervention agenda*; and (c) *the old way of doing things vs. new approaches*.

Real Life vs. Intervention Agenda

In some cases, participants had to negotiate between attending to real-life events and circumstances and the desire to include SJP interventions and discuss SJP-related topics. Paula shared her consternation over wanting to create space for student activism in the midst of a tightly packed semester of content:

> My class this week coincided with the National Day without Immigrants Strike … As an academic scholar-activist, I wanted to support the students' desire to be in solidarity with the Strike. As an immigrant and migrant worker myself, I, too, wanted to withhold my labor

that day and participate in the Strike. At the same time, another part of me was concerned about the implications of calling off classes that week on our coverage of class content.

Laura's trepidation over discussing certain SJP-related topics in the classroom stemmed from the perceived realities of her status as probationary faculty: 'I think I was especially um … somewhat scared to talk about anything political in my class right now. I don't, I am a pre-tenured faculty in a highly evaluative um, and I'm a temporary employee right now and I … I'm not trying to piss anybody off.'

Course Content vs. Intervention Agenda

A significant challenge noted by all participants was finding time to include SJP interventions without sacrificing planned course content to accommodate student learning objectives. Christine noted, 'One of my challenges with the research methods class is, there's so much to teach, and you know, not having enough time.' Christine elaborated, 'for me a challenge was, you know, was just like a balance of like, feeling like I have enough time to dedicate to the SJP while still covering all that stuff you know, I'm required to cover' for the necessary competencies and accreditation in her field. Paula acknowledged that 'one main challenge I experienced and continue to experience is the lack of time I have each week in class to go over content, have some class activity and exercise, and do some reflections … I find myself running out of time to go over other content.' This tension extended to the challenge of integrating SJP interventions with course content. Laura explained:

> I too am struggling to find ways to integrate all of the SJP intervention elements, especially at the end of the semester. There is so much content to cover and I am not sure if I am going to be able to get to everything … at these early stages, I am doing SJP as an add-on to the course. It's not really integrated, which takes a lot longer to create the lectures and assignments for … I am making room for extra stuff rather than integrating.

Tension was most pronounced for Laura, who was grappling with time constraints as well as the challenge of integrating SJP interventions with the course content of her academic discipline.

The Old Way of Doing Things vs. New Approaches

All participants had extensive prior experience teaching research methods, familiarity which served them well in the classroom, yet sometimes made it challenging to incorporate new methods in their teaching practices. Christine admitted, 'you know after you've taught a course so many times you can maybe get a little bit lazy about class prep. So I think being part of the intervention maybe was a good check on that.' For Laura, experience with research methods helped her deal with the tension of attempting new SJP interventions. In a written reflection, she explained, 'I did not include any specific intervention techniques this week but I am again struggling with in general how to make my existing lessons focus on social justice. It's just not a natural or intuitive process for me. For this to work, I think we need many more examples to give to instructors who may be less familiar with social justice concepts.' In her interview, Laura added, 'I don't have the language to do that so, you know, um at times I just went back to content, I was like I don't really want to do anything else.' The tension around integrating

new approaches into established curricula under time constraints also made the participants at times feel vulnerable in the classroom.

Vulnerability

Attempting to incorporate SJP strategies in the research methods classroom did not come without a sense of risk for the participants. The vulnerability they experienced was demonstrated across three sub-themes: (a) *safety and inclusivity*; (b) *leaning into the uncomfortable*; and (c) *struggling to define a personal social justice pedagogy*.

Achieving Safety and Inclusivity

Based on principles of SJP, the participants strove to design their classes in ways that heightened belongingness for students and helped them feel safe. As a novice SJP practitioner, Laura felt vulnerable in some of her efforts to engage students:

> It's like we're trying to reach students who normally aren't, um, included, but that at the same time then there's students who are resistant, are feeling now they're feeling excluded, like white males or whatever. I just like don't have the language yet to, what if I'm a white male in that class and I feel like, let's be honest, I'm not feeling really bad for the white male, like you know what I mean? But at the same time, what do I say to them to have them not just disengage from the classroom?

Laura's experience indicates the challenge of getting all students to see themselves in and value social justice perspectives without alienating anyone. Christine noted how difficult it can be to understand how students are really feeling as members of a class: 'I mean, did I do a really excellent job on making sure that every single student felt like they belong there and they, their voice mattered and you know, I don't know. You know and again, I think some students are just more quiet than I would've liked back then, so maybe I could've done more to bring those students out.'

Leaning into the Uncomfortable

Laura continued to grapple with discomfort when introducing SJP in her class throughout the semester. In a weekly reflection, she wrote:

> I hate the idea of disengaging any part of the class. I feel the same way about some of the SJP lessons. What should I say to the male white students in class? Are they uncomfortable? How can they connect with the ideas about social justice without feeling blamed or in trouble? I am still trying to navigate how me as a white woman is delivering this social justice in an authentic way. I am thinking I need to share more about myself, which is kind of scary to be vulnerable but I am wondering if it might help build a better connection with the students.

In addition to the fear of sharing more of herself in the classroom, Laura felt vulnerable due to her lack of grounding in SJP. As she explained, 'I also am not very confident in knowing what to do with these conversations. Like, I don't want to start something that I don't know how to handle. So, because I don't have a background in SJP or social justice from an academic perspective … I don't know what I'm doing.' Laura further explained her lack of confidence around doing SJP: ' … different things that happen in the classroom make you feel more or less confident. And part of the reason

that I have lower confidence is because I am not competent at doing this, like this is not my skill set.'

Struggling to Define a Personal Social Justice Pedagogy

It was not surprising that Laura, the team member from the academic field with the least curricular integration of social justice, struggled to develop a personal approach to doing SJP. For her, vulnerability was also tied to a lack of comprehensive training. Laura shared a story about one particular class discussion that she felt did not go well:

> I asked one student who said, 'Kinesiology does not promote social justice at all because how can you promote social justice when you're studying bone density?' I was completely thrown off, mostly because I don't know a thing about bone density. My area is sport psychology. I asked the students if they had any ideas, to which one woman said you could study nutrition and how access to good or poor quality food could affect bone density. I liked that suggestion. And then another student said that there are differences in bone density in terms of race, particularly African Americans. I was even more thrown off and started talking about how race is a social construct but I was definitely flustered. This student actually told one of my graduate students later about how oddly I responded in class. So I definitely did not feel comfortable and really had opened up a conversation that I didn't know how to handle. It made me feel not as competent and honestly as though I did not really want to do the intervention anymore because I am not doing it well.

Christine also noted a desire for more explicit instructions for implementing SJP interventions after a role model presentation did not go as well as she had hoped. She said, 'I think in terms of the intervention, I think it would be really good to structure it a little more and come up with questions that you want your presenter to address because I think without that structure you're gonna have people presenting all kinds of different stuff.' Laura identified training and support as necessary for building her confidence in doing SJP and eventually feeling less vulnerable in the classroom. She reflected,

> From an intervention perspective, I think we need to include more examples of how regular lessons can be converted to social justice ones. Also, as someone who has no background in social justice and my field is not particularly social justice focused, I do not feel well supported by the intervention. I often feel ill-equipped to discuss social justice issues so anyone who is going to implement this needs more resources and support.

Notably, Laura and the other participants persisted in their efforts to do SJP in the context of research methods despite experiencing varying levels of discomfort with their attempts.

Meaningful Teaching Experience

The overall experience of doing SJP was a meaningful one for Paula, Christine, and Laura, as reflected across the sub-themes of (a) embracing *creativity*; (b) reaping *rewards*; and (c) witnessing immediate *impact*.

Embracing Creativity

For the participants, creativity was often borne out of necessity to meet the demands of implementing the SJP interventions in already packed research methods courses. Paula shared that 'for me … it's just trying to do all those other activities at the same time. I

try to be creative about it.' She further explained that 'being creative about how to meet that, it doesn't just mean going through an entire lecture I prepared. So, I did enjoy kind of being more creative.' Laura felt more comfortable doing the interventions when she had time to creatively plan social justice examples to illustrate key research concepts. She was able to link a lesson on sampling and validity to polling from the 2016 Presidential Election:

> I did feel another thing that went well was I did feel comfortable, I brought up some examples of things that I thought were, you know, at times when I had the time to plan or think about it, like about social justice or inequity and that was kinda cool … like one of the polls in the election from last fall … talking about how like basically um, like one 19 year old Black man from Illinois data was weighted 300 times um (laughs) what the rest of the sample was. So, it was just kind of cool to relate it to something, not only just like in pop culture or in the media or news or in the world, but like, in a meaningful way, like well, why is that?

Reaping Rewards

The participants all experienced rewarding moments during the intervention semester. As Christine recounted, 'Applying SJP intervention was something that I enjoyed doing.' Laura also found the application of social justice principles rewarding. She shared, 'One thing I really liked about it was … this idea of kind of, I don't know, it felt more meaningful than just teaching content. So, it was like content plus – life (laughs), or life lessons or something. It wasn't just, let's talk about sampling or let's just talk about instrumentation.' Practicing SJP also helped Laura feel a greater sense of belonging in her university. She explained,

> It felt like I'm doing more and also in the context it felt … it felt … I felt a bigger part of the university in some ways. Because our mission … because I am thinking about social justice versus like if I was teaching somewhere else, I could teach research methods anywhere, but I'm teaching it here and I'm teaching it in a different way and that's, I don't know, makes me feel better about the, being at this university.

Witnessing Immediate Impact

The perceived impact of the SJP interventions on students was meaningful for the participants as well. Paula noted that the values affirmation exercise at the beginning of the semester 'really helped frame the class, and it also helped students understand just how, um, even in the research process that … you have social justice principles and values also infusing that and that one needs to be conscious about that when they are engaged in research.' Laura directly witnessed the impact of the role model intervention when a graduate student from her department spoke to her class:

> She was amazing – very prepared and thoughtful about what she said. She got emotional discussing her background being a Latina American/Mexican American woman and student. She was extremely grateful for her mother and how much her mom has been her support system throughout her life. It was really powerful and I just was thinking that it got really real in the middle of research methods class. How crazy is that? I would not have expected something so meaningful in a class about research but this intervention has forced me to create that space for students.

In her reflection from the week of this presentation, Laura wrote about how much the talk resonated with two of her undergraduate students. One student was 'blown away by her talk' and another emailed the graduate student to inform her that 'she wanted to get involved in the research.' Laura commented, 'That was amazing to me because I have a good relationship with this student but she has never mentioned to me that she was interested in research. It was watching the role modeling work immediately.' Of the SJP interventions, Paula noted, 'I think it really provided space for the students, like I said, even those who were particularly quiet, you know, were more engaging in asking questions um, and so I think that that worked well also, just having space for that.'

Another measure of impact for the participants was the effect of doing SJP on their overall teaching practice. Christine observed, 'I think our intervention has really … kind of impacted my teaching in other courses as well, I mean the main course that I'm teaching this year is the [writing competency] course that I think I apply in particular a lot of, like, growth mindset talk to um … the students' writing, you know.' Laura appreciated the value of the role model intervention, stating, 'I am definitely going to keep having role models come into class in future semesters. It seems so obvious to do that and make a big difference.'

Discussion

This study addresses a gap in educational research by focusing on educators' experiences in translating SJP ideals into actual, viable pedagogy (Quin 2009). Through examination of critically-reflexive reflections and interviews with three faculty members doing SJP in research methods courses, we were able to highlight *intra*personal processes (Breunig 2016) and identify common challenges and rewards associated with doing SJP. Although the participant with the least experience with SJP experienced more tensions and challenges than the other two, all three found the experience ultimately rewarding and transformative.

Intentionality

This theme was related to participants' increased self-awareness of their teaching styles and potential biases, and an increased commitment to SJP. Too often research methods courses engage in passive, rote-learning methods such as lecture and multiple-choice exams that require little creativity and stress content over pedagogy, resulting in students experiencing such courses as culturally irrelevant, unwelcoming, and unsafe (Hamstra, Ampaw, and Hornak 2021). In this study, participants wrestled with the best ways to adopt SJP principles. This theme supports previous findings that faculty members need to start any process of unlearning old methods and introducing new, more collaborative and democratic methods with a period of critical reflexivity (Quin 2009). This process could be encouraged by creating faculty mentors trained in SJP to support faculty in wrestling well with their pedagogy, using peer observations of teaching that provide gentle feedback rather than evaluation, and forming supportive SJP FLCs. Exercises such as the SJSDT (Taylor et al. 2019) were designed to help participants look at the classroom from a broad perspective, starting with the syllabus and building more critical reflexivity into course redesign.

Holding Tension

Participants were pulled in multiple directions by the expectations of departments and accreditation bodies about what content must be covered in the course (Kelly, Brandes, and Orlowski 2004), time constraints, and perceived priorities (e.g. is it more important to cover content or take time for a values affirmation exercise?). All participants recognized that transforming a class with SJP is a process, and they were at a stage where the intervention elements felt more like an 'add-on' that took time away from content, rather than a true integration of SJP methods of delivering content. These tensions are consistently noted in the literature on STEM pedagogy (Hamstra, Ampaw, and Hornak 2021; Nind, Kilburn, and Luff 2015; Wagner, Garner, and Kawulich 2011), indicating a need for ongoing critically-reflexive sessions where faculty can share these experiences, thus normalizing the process of discomfort and tension that comes from learning any new approach. In institutions with centers for teaching and learning, SJP FLCs could be sponsored, allowing for interdisciplinary sharing. If such support is not available, having an SJP faculty mentor or small departmental or college FLC can offer support and resources needed to negotiate the tensions while learning. Departments can also spend time developing student learning outcomes that are grounded in SJP, so that the goals of content and social justice education are understood as one-in-the same, thereby supporting faculty in redefining 'meaningful content' and making necessary curricula changes.

Vulnerability

Some of the tensions noted above, plus other aspects of the intervention, felt risky to participants. They felt vulnerable if they were caught in their own learning, such as not being able to answer a question or feeling unprepared. Laura, the one participant without tenure, noted that it felt risky trying something new with students who might evaluate her poorly (see also Cineas 2021). Many faculty evaluations conducted within higher education do not measure the developmental process of teaching and treat teaching as a binary– good or bad– and do not encourage innovation and risk-taking. SJP may also make faculty members feel vulnerable if the increased critical self-reflexivity reveals their own biases and lack of knowledge. Laura and Christine were also concerned with the potential for making majority students uncomfortable. So much emphasis has been put on safety in the classroom that it has obscured the necessity of discomfort in motivating transformational learning. Discomfort on the part of both faculty and students is to be expected, and vulnerability can lead to powerful learning experiences (hooks 1994). A supportive SJP FLC can help members negotiate these feelings of vulnerability, and institutions can broaden their definitions of effective teaching to go beyond quantitative student ratings that might reflect being challenged to think differently about historical and current systems of oppression. Without such support, faculty members may retreat to old, more autocratic, content-driven ways of teaching that are safer but also more disengaging for teachers and students (Breunig 2016). Additionally, faculty can discuss experiences of vulnerability with students as a means of modeling doing social justice work within oppressive, hierarchical systems. Modeling transparency is not only a way to embody social justice, but supports students in preparing for the vulnerability and risks they will face as agents of social change in their fields.

Meaningful Teaching Experience

In spite of the challenges that SJP raised for our participants, they all felt more positive about themselves as teachers, found the process to be personally rewarding, and witnessed immediate impact on students. They were able to use more creativity in the class than they had previously. In terms of immediate impact on students, participants all noted the power of the role model guest speakers. Their students were more engaged and animated during these presentations. Even though this activity took away substantial time from content, they unanimously declared this to be a high impact practice that they would continue. Other activities had less visible impact, although substantial literature shows that values affirmations have long-term impact on student success (Spitzer and Aronson 2015). The implication of this theme is that the vulnerability, tensions, and challenges of introducing SJP were worthwhile because the participants felt more satisfied with their performance, particularly their ability to bring their own creativity into the class. Additionally, this theme highlights the need for critical reflexive processes that draw attention to the successes and benefits experienced by educators while learning and doing SJP, as well as the areas where growth is needed. For administrators, our findings suggest that SJP may be a tool for faculty retention and reduction of burnout, both of which adversely affect student success. Encouraging faculty creativity and celebrating successes is also a way to 'push back' against oppressive institutional, bureaucratic practices or limited student learning outcomes and create the necessary buy-in for faculty to take risks and implement SJP (Kelly, Brandes, and Orlowski 2004).

Limitations

This was an exploratory study: the findings are limited by our intervention being only one semester in length, with only three volunteer participants who were already motivated to learn about SJP in a university that is committed to SJP. Most of the research on SJP that informed our intervention was conducted at predominantly white institutions with mostly white students and faculty. Their research aimed at finding ways for students of color to feel a sense of belonging and inclusion in their classrooms. The majority of students in our classes were from underrepresented groups, thus the classroom dynamics were different than in much of the published literature on SJP.

Conclusion

Recent challenges to CRT and curricula that acknowledge the legacy of racism throughout U.S. history signal the need for teaching practices grounded in SJP. Doing SJP, however, is more than adding a mission statement to a syllabus, and understanding educators' experiences in doing so is vital to our ability to provide the resources necessary for their continued growth and validation. The experiences of our participants give voice to the complexities of engaging in SJP. Even with a fair amount of institutional support for this type of teaching in our university, our findings suggested that adopting SJP still felt risky and uncomfortable and challenged old ways of thinking about higher education. SJP is not a 'safe,' or stable, fixed approach to teaching, but rather, a developmental journey filled with periods of conflict, uncertainty, tension, and self-doubt. It is on the

cutting edge of critical thinking, and fosters a growth mindset. It is a challenging, rewarding, liberatory journey of personal and pedagogical growth that positively impacts educators and students. SJP is, however, made easier with institutional support, specific and ongoing training that provides SJP tools and resources, and, notably, opportunities for informed, critically-reflexive activities and dialogue with similarly invested colleagues.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Declarations of interest

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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